
Promising Practice Fact Sheet – Child-Only TANF/Kinship Care Integrated Services – El Paso County, Colorado

Program

Description: In the late 1990s, El Paso County, Colorado developed a new integrated services model for TANF families that achieved national recognition. At the core of the model were joint teams of TANF and child welfare staff, cross-trained in each other's jobs and jointly serving shared clients who had access to both TANF and child welfare resources. A single case plan facilitated meeting the requirements of both programs. Funding streams were combined and paperwork and court involvement were reduced.

Target Population: High-need TANF families (on assistance longer than 2 years, sanctioned families, families with substance abusing parents, teen parents); kinship families, including clients shared between TANF and child welfare.

Goal: To provide more coordinated, comprehensive, and efficient services to this population.

Caseload Data: El Paso County served an average of 2,031 TANF families per month in 2004 when this model was still in operation. The integrated team model has since been abandoned but TANF and child welfare staff still collaborate more than they did before the model was initiated.

Cost: Unknown.

Evidence: El Paso County's integrated service model received extensive national recognition but was never formally evaluated.

Services Overview: The following are some key features of El Paso County's integrated services approach:

- Common intake
- In-depth assessment
- Co-location of community-based organizations providing job training and employment, domestic violence, and substance abuse services.
- Cross-training of TANF and child welfare staff.

Eligibility: See "target population" above.

Findings:

Outcome trends presented by former El Paso County Director of Human Services David A. Berns at a July 12, 2007 conference on poverty and child welfare:

- Reduced TANF caseload, without resort to sanctions or other punitive approaches
- Reduced number of children and youth in foster care
- Reduced institutional placements
- Increased child safety

Implications for Policymakers and Program Developers to Consider:

- The TANF and child welfare systems mirror each other's strengths and weaknesses, which makes improved coordination beneficial for both systems and the clients they serve.
- For example, TANF is strong in the areas of financial and food assistance, and assistance with child care, transportation, education and training, and employment, but weak in providing services for substance abuse, mental illness, or domestic violence, or dealing with family dynamics or issues related to the well-being of children.
- The child welfare system has the opposite strengths and weaknesses.
- Family strength-base approach with focus on prevention.
- Flexible use of TANF funding.

Resources:

"A Vision for Eliminating Poverty and Family Violence: Transforming Child Welfare and TANF in El Paso County, Colorado", Rutledge Q. Hutson, Center for Law and Social Policy, January 2003.

"Uniting Welfare and Child Welfare: The El Paso County Department of Human Services", Kennedy School of Government Case Program, Harvard University, 2003.

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